DIOGENES

Diogenes 207: 75–87
ISSN 0392-1921

Thinking Rocks, Living Stones: Reflections on Chinese Lithophilia

Graham Parkes

One of the most fascinating features that distinguish Chinese culture from the world's other great traditions is its enduring passion for stone. As in many other places, there is prehistoric evidence in China of religious practices in which stone plays a key role, but the Chinese veneration for stone in its natural, unworked state is unparalleled in its intensity and range. A classic historical text from around the 3rd century BCE mentions 'weird rocks' or 'strange stones' (*guai shi*) being sent as tribute to the mythical emperor Yu, and records of rocks being arranged in emperors' parks go back some two thousand years.[1] At first a prerogative of the imperial families, enthusiasm for stone spread subsequently to the literati, and it remains widespread in the culture to this day. This enthusiasm manifests itself not only in the art of garden making, where sizeable rocks constitute both the framework and the primary features of classical gardens, but also on a smaller scale in the practice of collecting and displaying stones of more modest size to be placed in trays or on the desks of scholars. After assessing the nature of this love of stone in China, and then sketching the philosophical presuppositions for it, I conclude with a brief outline of implications for our experience of, and interactions with, stone and rocks.

Historical considerations

During the reign of the emperor Xiao Mingdi (6th century CE), a minister of agriculture created an estate known as 'Mountain of Bright Beauty' whose salient feature was an artificial mountain (*jiashan*) constructed from strangely shaped rocks.[2] Mountains are regarded as sacred in the Chinese tradition, and revered as the most spectacular manifestations of the powerful telluric energies that emerge from the earth. These energies can be reproduced in a park or garden by building rocks into a structure mimetic of mountains on a smaller scale, and such miniature mountains are common in larger Chinese gardens to this day. Corresponding to the paths that

SAGE: London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi, http://dio.sagepub.com
DOI: 10.1177/0392192105055173

lead through real mountains are walkways leading through and beneath them that allow one to experience the energies of the structure from a quasi subterranean perspective within the 'mountain'.

The 17th-century garden manual by Ji Cheng, *The Craft of Gardens* (Yuanye), recommends that the rocks used for the peaks of artificial mountains should be larger at the top than below, and fitted together so that 'they will have the appearance of being about to soar into the air.'[3] The effect with such mountains is often comparable to that of the Gothic cathedral, where the aim is to counteract the weight of the stone by lending it the appearance of lightness.

During the Tang dynasty (618–906) the scholar-poet and prime minister Li Deyu built a famous rock garden in his estate near Luoyang, in which he arranged fantastically shaped rocks from many different parts of the country. The most spectacular came from Lake Tai (Tai Hu, 'Grand Lake') near Shanghai and Suzhou, in the heart of literati culture. Li dignified the best rocks in his collection by having the words *youdao* ('possessing the Way') incised on them, and such inscriptions became common practice for subsequent enthusiasts.[4] The earliest description we have of a Taihu rock, which became the most highly prized kind in China during the Tang, comes from a poem by Bai Juyi, who was a good friend of Li Deyu's.

> Its controlling spirit overpowers the bamboo and trees,
> Its manifested energy dominates the pavilions and terrace.
> From its interior rise quiet whispers,
> Is it the womb of the winds?
> Sharp swords show in its angular edges,
> Their ringing resonance clearer than jasper chimes.
> Its great shape seems to move,
> Its massive forces seem on the brink of collapse.[5]

The geology of the Lake Tai area is remarkable in that the rock there is formed from limestone deposits nearly 300 million years old.[6] These ancient formations were corroded into extravagant shapes when the area was covered by sea, and were subsequently worked and sculpted by the action of hard pebbles on the bed of the lake during storms. Especially fine specimens of these Taihu rocks – which often look like frozen billows of sea spume, or enormous stone fungi burgeoning into the air, or extravagant coral formations poised in an invisible ocean – often stand alone as the centerpieces of famous gardens.

As the aesthetics of rocks developed over the centuries, four desiderata for this type of rock came to be considered primary: *shou* ('leanness'), *zhou* ('surface texture'), *lou* ('channels and indentations') and *tou* ('foraminate structure,' characterized by multiple holes and openings). The 'lean' means that the rock should be without any kind of 'fat' or excrescences that would obscure the expression of its internal structure or energy (*qi*). The surface texture and channels and indentations were similarly valued as indicators of the forces that had formed the rock. Foraminate structure was prized for being expressive of the transformations that make up the world as a whole and the interplay between void and form.

One of the most famous painters and calligraphers of the Song dynasty (960–1279), the poet Mi Fu, has been proposed with justification as the ultimate con-

noisseur of rocks in the Chinese tradition. On taking up an appointment as a magistrate in Anhui province, a place renowned for the quality of its stone, he is said to have noticed a magnificent rock in a garden of the official precincts. Overwhelmed with admiration, he made obeisance to it and from then on addressed it respectfully as 'Elder Brother Rock' every time he passed by. The episode became a favorite theme of painters, who delighted in assimilating the poet's shape and attire to the contours and patterns of the much larger rock.[7] The frequent depictions in painting of the isomorphism between human and stone attest to their enduring affinity in the Chinese tradition.

The emperor who ruled China for the first quarter of the 12th century, Huizong, was not only a great connoisseur of stone but also the most accomplished painter among the many Chinese emperors who painted as well as reigned. One of his best known paintings is of a rock in an imperial garden called *Auspicious Dragon Rock*.[8] Possessed by a passion for stone that amounted to obsession, Huizong built a huge park near his capital at Kaifeng in which he constructed several miniature mountains. In one garden an enormous mountain of rocks, with 'ten thousand layered peaks' was said to have risen to a height of 75 metres. The emperor filled his park with the finest zoomorphic and anthropomorphic rocks he could find. What fascinates about such stone is the way natural processes sculpt the apparently least animate form of being into the shapes of more complex forms such as plants, animals, and human beings.

At the western entrance to the park Huizong placed a rock some 15 metres high. A visitor observed at the time: 'The rocks on the side had various forms. Some looked like ministers having audience with the Emperor. They were solemn, serious, trembling and full of awe. Some were charging forward as if they had some important advice or argument to present.'[9] Here we see the Confucian tradition vitally embodied in the practice of arranging rocks in such a way as to make their interrelations mimetic of social relationships. Huizong gave names to his most spectacularly anthropomorphic rocks and had these inscribed on them in gold. Although the park was called *Genyue*, 'Impregnable Mountain' or 'Mountain of Longevity,' the emperor expended so much of his fortune on it that the extravagance eventually cost him the empire – and all his rocks, gardens, and miniature mountains along with it.

At first the collecting and arranging of rocks in gardens was the jealously guarded privilege of emperors and princes. The execution during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) of a rich merchant who had been so presumptuous as to build a large garden filled with excellent rocks sufficed to curb further such activities on the part of commoners.[10] Nevertheless, over the centuries the establishment of private estates gradually became acceptable, and the wealthier scholars and literati began to build modestly sized gardens furnished with rocks adjacent to their houses. The proliferation of scholars' gardens reached its height during the Tang dynasty, especially in places like Suzhou near Lake Tai, and the making of such gardens continues to this day. A magnificent description of an opulent private garden is to be found in the famous 18th-century novel, *The Story of the Stone* (less helpfully known as *The Dream of the Red Chamber*).[11]

The Chinese are traditionally given to what has been called 'correlative thinking,' in which the foremost correlation is that between macrocosm and microcosm. Their

sense of correspondence between mountains and rocks is especially profound: rocks are thought to partake of the powers of the mountain less through their resembling its outward appearance than for their being true microcosms, animated by the same energies that formed the heights and peaks. The introduction to the 12th-century treatise by Du Wan, the *Cloud Forest Catalogue of Rocks*, which appears to be the world's first handbook of rock aesthetics, begins with the statements: 'The purest energy of the heaven-earth world coalesces into rock. It emerges, bearing the soil. Its formations are wonderful and fantastic . . . Within the size of a fist can be assembled the beauty of a thousand cliffs.'[12] As Rolf Stein has convincingly shown, the idea that miniaturization loses none of the power of the original – and may even increase it – is prevalent in a number of Asian traditions.

And so alongside the arranging of rocks in Chinese gardens there developed the collecting of smaller stones to be displayed on stands or tables indoors, and especially on scholars' desks, or else used to make miniature landscapes in trays (*penjing*). The *Cloud Forest Catalogue of Rocks* deals mainly with larger specimens, but it also mentions 'exquisite miniatures, which may be placed on stands for one's pleasure'.

Stone connoisseurship reached a peak during the Song dynasty, an era that also saw the creation of some of the world's greatest landscape painting. Amazingly, some stones of that period were more highly valued than the contemporary paintings. The 11th-century poet and artist Su Shi (also known as Su Dongpo), a contemporary of Mi Fu's, paid a hundred pieces of gold for a small specimen whose shape resembled a well-known mountain in Anhui. He famously claimed that the 'Chouchi' stones in his collection were worth as much as works by the master of Tang dynasty horse painting.[13]

Stone collecting reached another high point in the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and has remained popular ever since. A contemporary account describes the vitalizing effect of a particular stone on one of the era's most famous collectors, Mi Wanzhong, as follows: 'If he was tired, the stone would rouse him; if he was feeling low, it would cheer him up. As the madness of his passion got worse, he was on the verge of becoming a stone himself.'[14]

Philosophical presuppositions

Examples could be multiplied that would confirm the Chinese as the world's foremost petromaniacs, but some readers may think that such unbridled enthusiasm for stone evidences a prevalence of primitive animism or, more charitably, anthropomorphic projection. Nothing could be farther from the truth – as the following brief exposition of the philosophical presuppositions underlying the Chinese passion for rock will show.

By contrast with the western tendency to make a sharp distinction between the animate and inanimate, with rocks falling on the lifeless side of the divide, the ancient Chinese understand all natural phenomena, including humans, as configurations of an energy they call *qi*. Around the 4th or 3rd century BCE, philosophical Daoism sets the direction for two millennia of subsequent Chinese thought in understanding the cosmos as a field of *qi* energies. In a chapter of the Daoist classic

Zhuangzi we read: 'The human being's life is an assembling of *qi*. The assembling is deemed birth, the dispersing is deemed death. . . . Running through the whole world there is nothing but the one *qi*' (ch. 22). Since breathing is a process that distinguishes the living from the dead, it was natural to think of the breath as a special manifestation of the energy that animates the cosmos, with an active (*yang*) phase corresponding to inhalation and a passive (*yin*) phase corresponding to exhalation.

A later Daoist text known as the *Huainanzi* (2nd century BCE) offers a more specific characterization of *qi* energy:

> A shoreline divided the primordial *qi*.
> That which was pure and bright spread out to form Heaven;
> The heavy and turbid congealed to form Earth . . .
> The conjoined essences of Heaven and Earth produced *yin* and *yang*.
> The essences of *yin* and *yang* caused the four seasons.
> The scattered essences of the four seasons created all things.[15]

Here *qi* is seen as the source of all particulars in the world, the variety among them depending on where they lie on the spectrum from the most rarefied ('pure and bright') to the most condensed ('heavy and turbid') forms of energy.

A similar idea seems to have arisen independently in ancient Greek cosmology, and especially in the thought of Anaximines, for whom the 'underlying nature is one and infinite and identified as air.' In particular he writes of condensation (*puknotês*) and rarefaction (*manotês*) as the two basic transformations of this one 'nature':

> It differs in its substantial nature by rarity and density. Being made finer it becomes fire, being made thicker it becomes wind, then cloud, then (when thickened still more) water, then earth, then stones; and the rest come into being from these.[16]

According to the *Huainanzi*, the *qi* energy that courses through the earth in particular places is going to have an effect on the beings that are born or originate there.

> Various sorts of earth give birth, each according to its own kind.
> The *qi* of the mountains thus gives birth to a preponderance of men;
> The *qi* of the low wetlands gives birth to a preponderance of women . . .
> The *qi* of stone produces much strength . . .
> All things are the same as their *qi*; all things respond to their own class.[17]

The list of topographical *qi* influences runs to fifteen items and basically recommends that one pay attention to the energetic background or context of all beings with which one comes into contact. This point is made succinctly in the *Huainanzi*'s opening chapter: 'If one's physical form is placed in an unsuitable abode, it will become incapacitated; if one's *qi* is made to fill what it does not rightfully fill, it will be leaked; if one's spirit is active when it is not suited to act, it will grow dim. These three are what one should watch over carefully.'[18]

A philosophy that sees transformations of energy as fundamental has no place for anything as substantial as the 'four elements' that underlie ancient Greek (and subsequently most western) thinking about the nature of the cosmos. However, this

difference was for a long time obscured by the practice of talking about the 'five elements' in Chinese cosmology – an infelicitous translation of the Chinese *wuxing*, which literally means 'five goings,' or 'transitions,' 'conducts,' 'doings,' 'processes' or 'phases [of transformation].'

A historical text from the 4th century BCE known as the *Zuo Commentary* (to the *Annals of Lu*) lists six kinds of atmospheric influences or energies: 'Heaven has the Six *Qi*. . . shade [*yin*] and sunshine [*yang*], wind and rain, dark and light.' Here *yin* and *yang* refer in their pre-philosophical use to the shady and sunny sides of a hill respectively (north and south sides in China, as in any place in the northern hemisphere), and they are thus associated with cold and heat as well as darkness and light.

Corresponding to the Six *Qi* of Heaven are the Five Processes associated with Earth: wood, fire, soil, metal, water. But earth, water, and fire here are significantly different from their counterparts in ancient Greek thought. Rather than referring to static elements that form the building blocks of the world, *wuxing* denotes the five primary phases of transformation through which telluric energies pass in a continuous cycle of self-generation: wood > fire > earth > metal > water > wood and so on. As a dense form of earth, stone is not to be understood as some kind of matter or substance but rather as a phase in this endless cycle of energetic transformations.

The Greek idea of the four elements as the essential components of a material world goes along with an understanding of Gods and humans as creators and makers of things through the introduction of formative powers from outside, and on the basis of a pattern or paradigm external to those things (even if internal to the mind of the Creator). The Five Processes are by contrast driven by the cosmic energy that flows through the particulars according to patterns that emerge from the place of those particulars within the larger matrix. In such a world human beings thrive by becoming aware of these transformations and engaging them in appropriate ways.

This kind of worldview is exemplified in a short but fascinating text by the 4th-century thinker Guo Pu called the *Zangshu* (Book of Burying), which has influenced a great deal of Chinese thinking about the relations of human beings to the earth, and especially those branches of *fengshui* that constitute practical environmental science. The book's primary concern is with how to find a proper place in which to bury one's predecessors, which depends on choosing a site with favorable 'life-breath' (*shengqi*). A successful choice will enhance the life-breath of the deceased's descendants and thereby help them prosper. But these ideas also have broader implications for those among the living who are concerned to find a proper place for their own flourishing. As François Jullien has suggested, one needs to approach such a text from a different perspective from that of classical western physics: 'Let us [rather] experience "physics" as the single "breath [*qi*] at the origin of things, forever circulating," which flows through the whole of space, endlessly engendering all existing things.'[19]

This vital breath is itself invisible, though discernible in the contours of the landscape. Places differ according to the patterns and concentrations of the energy flowing through them. Since *qi* also animates human beings, people who live in places where the circulations of vital breath are more intense will flourish more energetically. Again Jullien makes the point eloquently:

> Not only my own being, as I experience it intuitively, but the entire landscape that surrounds me as well, is continuously flooded by subterranean circulating energy . . . The most glorious sites will be those where it is most densely accumulated, where the circulation of the breath is most intense, its transformations most profound . . . By rooting one's dwelling here rather than elsewhere, one locks into the very vitality of the world, taps the energy of things more directly.

If the macrocosm of the earth can affect us human beings to this extent, the same will be true for the microcosm in the form of rocks. An entry on stone from an 18th-century encyclopedia characterizes rocks as follows:

> The essential energy of earth forms rock . . . Rocks are kernels of energy; the generation of rock from energy is like the body's arterial system producing nails and teeth . . . The earth has the famous mountains as its support . . . rocks are its bones.[20]

To describe rocks as the bones of the earth is by no means counter-intuitive for the western reader, but to appreciate the Chinese reverence for rock one has to concentrate on the characterization of stone as a manifestation of earth's 'essential energy.'

On this view it is natural to assume that rocks of unusual size or shape tend to be special conduits or reservoirs for *qi* energy; and since the human body is understood as a different configuration of the same energies, it is reasonable to assume that beneficial effects will flow from simply being in the presence of such rocks. The rock garden thereby becomes a site not only for aesthetic contemplation but also for self-cultivation and the enhancement of physical health, especially since the *qi* of the rocks will be vitalized by the flows of energy among the other natural components there. In a work called *A Eulogy to the Lodestone*, Guo Pu marvels at the inscrutable operations of the earth's energies: 'Lodestone draws in iron, amber picks up mustard seeds. Energy invisibly passes, cosmic numerology mysteriously matches. Things respond to each other, in ways beyond our knowing.'[21] Even if such thinkers as Guo Pu in China are unable to articulate just how these energies work, they know from experience that they have great efficacy.

Just as the breath that animates the human body through bringing oxygen to the blood is invisible, so the cosmic breath animating the body of the earth cannot be seen – though it can, with practice, be felt or otherwise sensed. Chinese acupuncture (which is based like *fengshui* on the premise of *qi* energy) has been slow to gain acceptance among practitioners of western medicine because its background assumptions are so different. For instance, the meridians along which the currents of *qi* flow through the human body are invisible, and western researchers were looking for literal conduits such as veins or nerves.

Corresponding presuppositions impede acceptance of the idea of energies flowing through the earth along 'lifelines' that cannot be directly seen but can be intuitively discerned by the well-trained practitioner. But in fact a physics associated with a transformation in our experience through practice was elaborated long ago in the West by the Stoics and Epicureans, as has been pointed out by Pierre Hadot: 'Contemplation of the physical world and imagination of the infinite are important elements of Epicurean physics. Both can bring about a complete change in our way of looking at things. The closed universe is infinitely dilated, and we derive from this

spectacle a unique spiritual pleasure.'[22] Moreover, the idea of earth's being pervaded by lifelines should be less mysterious to western physicists since the discovery of the earth's magnetic field (the magnetosphere), whose energies flow along lines that are similarly invisible.

Experiential implications

Before considering the implications of the Chinese understanding of stone, I want to suggest that there is another respect in which it may be less foreign that it appears. For there are some other thinkers (in the line of the Stoics and Epicureans) whose understanding is somewhat similar – and decidedly unorthodox with respect to mainstream western philosophy. Very briefly: two lines of thought branch out from the ideas of Goethe, who in a small gem of an essay entitled 'On Granite' writes that 'granite peaks . . . exist prior to and superior to all life.' Not lifeless rock, then, but something superior to all life. On one branch we have Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and on the other Emerson and Thoreau – from whose works a few representative quotations will have to suffice.

For Schopenhauer, the mineral realm is animated by the same 'will' that energizes human beings, only at a lower degree of 'objectification' than in the case of plants, animals, and humans. Interestingly, in his discussion of the gravity-inspired 'will' of stone, Schopenhauer mentions the *yin/yang* philosophy found in the Chinese *Book of Changes* (Yijing).[23] A number of early autobiographical fragments portray the young Nietzsche as an incipient lithophile, as reflected in a rhetorical question in a later aphorism: 'Is a human being not well described when we hear that . . . from childhood on he experiences and reveres unhewn rocks as witnesses of prehistory which are eager to acquire language?' [24]

Under the influence of both Goethe and Schopenhauer, Nietzsche writes with reference to the supposedly 'dead world' of the inorganic realm: 'Let us beware of saying that life is opposed to death. The living is merely a species of the dead, and a very rare species at that.'[25] An unpublished note elaborates on this idea:

> How distant and superior is our attitude toward what is dead, the anorganic, and all the while we are three-quarters water and have anorganic minerals in us that perhaps do more for our well- and ill-being than the whole of living society! . . . The inorganic conditions us through and through: water, air, earth, the shape of the ground, electricity, *etc*.[26]

This mineral component to the human constitution and our being conditioned by inorganic forces (the central topic of *fengshui*) together constitute the basis of the feeling of kinship with rocks.

A major influence on the young Nietzsche was Emerson, who had also been deeply influenced by Goethe. In his early essays Emerson is constantly impressed by 'the amount of truth which nature illustrates to every individual.' 'Who can estimate this?' he asks; 'Who can guess how much firmness the sea-beaten rock has taught the fisherman?'[27] Like Goethe a great believer in the ancient principle (deriving from Theophrastus) that 'like can only be known by like,' Emerson thinks that the

sea-beaten rock can teach the fisherman firmness because it speaks to a rock-like solidity deep within the human soul. A similar point is made more explicitly in his essay 'Fate':

> On one side, elemental order, sandstone and granite, rock-ledges, peat-bog, forest, sea and shore; and, on the other part, thought, the spirit which composes and decomposes nature, – here they are, side by side, god and devil, mind and matter, king and conspirator, belt and spasm, riding peacefully together in the eye and brain of every man.

Finally, a magnificent exhortation from near the end of Emerson's active life: 'See what a cometary train of auxiliaries man carries with him, of animals, plants, stones, gases, and imponderable elements. Let us infer his ends from this pomp of means.'[28]

Both Emerson and his younger friend Thoreau were avid readers of the Asian philosophy that was available to them in translation, and Thoreau was especially interested in Chinese thought. Sentences like these, describing sailing down the Merrimack river, echo the emphasis on fluidity that is characteristic of Daoist thought:

> All things seemed with us to flow . . . The hardest material seemed to obey the same law with the most fluid, and so indeed in the long run it does. . . . There were rivers of rock on the surface of the earth, and rivers of ore in its bowels, and our thoughts flowed and circulated, and this portion of time was but the current hour.[29]

Perhaps under the influence of those Buddhist thinkers who undermined the distinction between sentient and nonsentient beings, Thoreau extended the domain of the organic into the so-called 'inanimate' world, as in this well known passage from *Walden*:

> There is nothing inorganic . . . The earth is not a mere fragment of dead history . . . but living poetry like the leaves of a tree, which precede flowers and fruit – not a fossil earth, but a living earth; compared with whose great central life all animal and vegetable life is merely parasitic.[30]

Thoreau's emphasis on the vitality of the mineral realm, which is perfectly consonant with classical Chinese thought, serves to mitigate the effects not only of anthropocentrism but also of biocentrism, in a way that anticipates contemporary 'ecocentric' thinking.

The classical Chinese garden with its emphasis on strangely shaped rocks, while generally acknowledged as one of the world's great art forms, tends to puzzle the western viewer on first acquaintance. But if one appreciates the Chinese conception of rocks as configurations of concentrated energies, the strangeness begins to lessen. Indeed a shift in our conception of stone can effect a shift in our perception of it, which in turn can enhance our aesthetic experience – and not only of Chinese gardens. For a number of techniques are employed in that art form which are transferable to other areas of experience.

For example, the second part of Shen Fu's *Six Records of a Floating Life*, a well known work of literature from the beginning of the 19th century, begins as follows:

> When I was small . . . I would often squat down by unkempt grassy places in flower beds or by niches in walls, low enough so that my head was level with them, and concentrate so carefully that to me the grass became a forest and the insects became animals. Imagining that small mounds of earth were hills and that shallow holes were valleys, I let my spirit wander there in happiness and contentment.[31]

One does not have to be Chinese to have similar memories from childhood, but Shen Fu puts such experiences to work in the service of aesthetic appreciation and creation. On an excursion to the mountains to sweep the family graves he finds some patterned rocks which he brings back home to his wife.

> We then built up a miniature mountain in a rectangular pot from the kilns at Yihsing. The mountain was on the left, with another small mound on the right . . . On top of the rocks we planted morning glories, which by the autumn had grown all over the mountain, covering it like wisteria hanging from a rock face, and when their flowers bloomed they were a deep red. The white duckweed we had planted also bloomed, and letting one's spirit wander among the red and the white was like a visit to Peng Island.[32]

Peng Island is the largest of the so-called 'Isles of the Immortals' in Daoist mythology, which are the basis for the paradisal pond-and-rock-islands style of garden popular in China and Japan. 'Letting one's spirit wander' in a miniature landscape is possible on the basis of a retrieval of the flexibility of viewpoint and scale that most people enjoy as children. The *locus classicus* for the promotion of this kind of flexibility is the *Zhuangzi*, but Shen Fu's formulation also echoes principles enunciated in several famous manuals of garden making.

> In laying out gardens, pavilions, wandering paths, small mountains of rocks, and flower plantings, try to give the feeling of the small in the large and the large in the small, of the real in the illusion and the illusion in the reality. . . . To make a miniature mountain, pile up some dirt, then place rocks on it and plant flowers and grass here and there. The fence in front of it should be of plum trees, and the wall behind it should be covered with vines, so that it will look like a mountain even though there is no mountain there.[33]

The rocks and mountains of the Chinese garden are not intended simply as sources of aesthetic pleasure but also as prompters of flexibility of visual experience in daily life.

Indeed the western tendency to separate out the aesthetic as a special kind of experience is absent from the Chinese world, where the aesthetic and the ethical are both bound up with the cultivation of mental and physical well-being. The Chinese are in general disinclined to compartmentalize – as evidenced by the close connections and interpenetrations among the arts of poetry, calligraphy, painting, music, and garden making. Once the dichotomy between the animate and inanimate is seen as somewhat arbitrary, along with the borders between the animal and vegetal and mineral realms, the well arranged garden can be experienced as a field in which the energies constituting the human body are harmonized with the *qi* of all other inhabitants of the place.

Nor does it make sense on the Chinese worldview to consider, or aim for, the

health of the human being in isolation from the health of the earth. The story of Meng Tian, the Qin Dynasty general who supervised the building of the first part of the Great Wall, is exemplary in this respect. According to the *Records of the Historian*, General Meng began in 221 BCE the construction of 'a Great Wall, constructing its defiles and passes in accordance with the configurations of the terrain.'[34] Ten years later, upon the death of his patron the first Qin emperor, Meng fell victim to a political plot fomented by the court eunuchs and was ordered to commit suicide. On receiving the order, he is said to have cried out in uncomprehending lamentation over this cruel stroke of fate. But then, on reflection, he said gravely: 'I am guilty, and assuredly should die . . . A moated wall of more than 10,000 *li*: in the course of this work I cannot have avoided cutting through the earth's veins: this is my guilt.' He thereupon swallowed a lethal dose of poison.[35]

Meng Tian's concern for respecting the earth is echoed again and again throughout Chinese history – even though economic and commercial interests were constantly outweighing what traditional philosophical ideas would recommend. Indeed reluctance to delving too deeply into the earth persisted in China, thanks to the influence of ideas from *fengshui*, up until the end of the 19th century. Entertaining evidence for this is to be found in a book by Edwin Joshua Dukes called *Everyday Life in China*. In a chapter entitled 'Feng-Shui, the Biggest of all Bugbears' he condemns the practice for obstructing the dissemination in China of Christianity, trade, and empirical science. In discussing the way *fengshui* involves the whole community (including its dead) in the planning of any new building project, the author waxes so ironical that his attempt to condemn unintentionally commends (at least to the ecologically sensitive reader of today):

> It will suggest itself at once to the reader that if we ignorant European outsiders were to live where we choose in China, to build as we like, to make roads and railways, to erect telegraph posts, to quarry stone wherever we saw any to our fancy, to delve recklessly into the bowels of the earth for coal, we should, in the opinion of the Chinese, be like 'a maniac scattering dust' and 'a fury slinging flame.' . . . No vengeance would be too dire to execute upon the rash mortal who could disregard the interest of his fellow-creatures in such a manner.[36]

One can only regret that economic pressures in a rapidly modernizing China have pretty much destroyed this traditional inclination to take into account the neighbors – living and dead, animate and inanimate – when deciding where and how deeply to encroach upon the environment. Without a renewed respect for rock and stone in the Middle Kingdom, which could profitably be promoted beyond its borders too, the fate of the earth as a whole may hang in the balance.

Graham Parkes
University of Hawaii, USA

Notes

1. See Kuck (1968: 39); Hay (1985: 18); Little (1999: 17).
2. Description by Yuan Xuanzhi, cited in Keswick (1978: 155).
3. Ji Cheng (1988: 110).
4. Schafer (1961: 57, 59).
5. Hay (1985: 19–21).
6. Hay (1985: 36).
7. Hay (1985: 32). See also Rambach and Rambach (1987: 78–9), where there is a reproduction of Mi Fu's 'Homage to the Rock' from Wang Gai's *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, and Hay (1985: 33–5), for three other paintings of this subject.
8. Reproduced in Little (1999: 20).
9. From *The Record of Hua Yang Palace* by the monk Zi-xui, cited in Keswick (1978: 54).
10. Kuck (1968: 45); Schafer (1961: 5).
11. Cao Xueqin (1973), vol. 1, ch. 17.
12. Cited in Hay (1985: 38).
13. Hay (1985: 60, 27).
14. Cited in Little (1999: 24).
15. *Huainanzi* 3:1a:1, trans. John Major (1993: 62).
16. Kirk and Raven (1963: 144–5).
17. *Huainanzi* 4:7a:1, trans. John Major (1993: 167).
18. Lau and Ames (1998: 131–2).
19. Jullien (1995: 91–2).
20. Cited from 'The Classical Contents of the Mirror of Profound Depths' in Hay (1985: 52). The entry on stone is 86 pages long.
21. Hay (1985: 53).
22. Hadot (1985: 87–8).
23. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: 23 and 27.
24. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe* 8:[11]11 and [28] 6; *Miscellaneous Opinions and Aphorisms* (*Human, All-too-human*, vol. 2/1), aphorism 49.
25. Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, aphorism 109.
26. Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe* 9:[11]125, 207, 210.
27. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*.
28. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Conduct of Life*, 'Considerations by the Way.'
29. Henry David Thoreau, *A Weekend on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, 'Thursday.'
30. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden: or, Life in the Woods*, 'Spring.'
31. Shen Fu (1983: 55).
32. Shen Fu (1983: 61–2).
33. Shen Fu (1983: 60).
34. Cited from the *Shiji* (Records of the historian), in the *Cambridge History of China*, 1:62.
35. March (1968: 260–1).
36. Dukes (1885).

References

Cao Xueqin (1973) *The Story of the Stone* (also known as *The Dream of the Red Chamber*), trans. David Hawkes. London and New York: Penguin Books.

Dukes, Edwin Joshua (1885) *Everyday Life in China; or, Scenes along river and road in Fuh-Kien*. London: Religious Tract Society.

Hadot, Pierre (1985) *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hay, John (1985) *Kernels of Energy, Bones of Earth: The Rock in Chinese Art*. New York: China Institute in America.

Ji Cheng (1988) *The Craft of Gardens*, trans. Alison Hardie. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.

Jullien, François (1995) *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*, trans. Janet Lloyd. New York: Zone Books.

Keswick, Maggie (1978) *The Chinese Garden: History, Art, and Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli.

Kirk, G. S. and Raven, J. E. (1963) *The Presocratic Philosophers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kuck, Loraine (1968) *The World of the Japanese Garden: From Chinese Origins to Modern Landscape Art*. New York: Weatherhill.

Lau, D. C. and Ames, Roger T. (1998) *Yuan Dao: Tracing Dao to its Source*. New York: Ballantine.

Little, Stephen (1999) *Spirit Stones of China*. Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago.

Major, John (1993) *Heaven and earth in early Han thought: chapters three, four and five of the* Huainanzi. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

March, Andrew L. (1968) 'An Appreciation of Chinese Geomancy,' *Journal of Asian Studies* 25: 253–67.

Parkes, Graham (2000) 'The Role of Rock in the Japanese Dry Landscape Garden,' in François Berthier, *Reading Zen in the Rocks: The Japanese Dry Landscape Garden*, pp. 85–155. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Parkes, Graham (2003) 'Winds, Waters, and Earth-Energies: *Fengshui* and Sense of Place,' in Helaine Selin (ed.), *Non-Western Views of Nature and the Environment*, pp. 185–209. Dordrecht and Boston, MA: Kluwer.

Rambach, Pierre and Rambach, Susanne (1987) *Gardens of Longevity in China and Japan: The Art of the Stone Raisers*, trans. André Marling. New York: Rizzoli.

Schafer, Edward H. (1961) *Tu Wan's Stone Catalogue of Cloudy Forest*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Selin, Helaine (2002) *Nature across Cultures: Non-Western Views of Nature and the Environment*. Dordrecht and Boston, MA: Kluwer.

Shen Fu (1983) *Six Records of a Floating Life*, trans. Leonard Pratt and Chiang Su-hui. London and New York.

Stein, Rolf A. (1990) *The World in Miniature: Container Gardens and Dwellings in Far Eastern Religious Thought*, trans. Phyllis Brooks. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.